DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 290 CE 080 913

AUTHOR	Rabo, Annika
TITLE	Tapping a Potential for the Good of All.
PUB DATE	2000-04-09
NOTE	17p.; In: TEND 2000: Proceedings of the Technological Education and National Development Conference, "Crossroads of the New Millennium" (2nd, April 8-10, 2000, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates); see CE 080 883.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Planning; Comparative Analysis; Developed Nations; Developing Nations; *Economic Development; Education Work Relationship; *Educational History; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Individual Development; Nationalism; Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; *Role of Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Educational Objectives; *Traditionalism; Vocational Education; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Jordan; Sweden; Syria

ABSTRACT

Historically, the spread of universal formal mass education in the West is closely linked to emergence of nation-states. This is also true of the Third World. The salient feature of education today is that it reflects a model of society in which citizens, including children, are seen as a potential to be tapped for development of the nation, as well as of its individual members. In Syria, education has expanded tremendously in scope and scale. The importance of education in Jordan can be shown by the simple fact that out of around 4 million inhabitants in 1991, almost 2 million were pupils. Comparison of essays written by students in Syria, Jordan, and Sweden shows that Middle Eastern pupils' essays reflect what they have been taught to see as desired and desirable goals, and the pupils stress unanimously their duty towards national development. Swedish pupils are very different. None seem to have any particular national aspiration; few have any clear educational plan. Pupils in Syria and Jordan are educationally geared toward higher education despite needs in vocational careers. The Middle East has a fairly low participation of its educated women in the work force. Swedish women are, according to educational authorities, too traditional in program choice in higher education. Swedish students are confident in their future plans, but Middle Eastern students feel cheated since jobs suited to their educational levels are not available. (12 endnotes) (YLB)

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ED 446 290

TEND 2000

Crossroads of the New Millennium

Tapping A Potential For The Good Of All

Prepared and Presented

By

Dr. Annika Rabo

Researcher

Centre for International Migration and Ethnic Relations

Stockholm University

e-mail : Annika.Rabo@ceifo.su.se

Sunday 9 April, 2000

Workshop 2

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Abstract

In this paper I explore some of the ambiguities in educational policies in Jordan, Syria and Sweden.

The Middle East and Sweden obviously differ in history and educational policies and traditions. Sweden has a long tradition of mandatory schooling, while in the Middle East the tremendous expansion of schooling and higher education is more recent. But there are similarities too. Education, including higher education, is universally seen by state agencies as a means to develop both the nation and the individuals of the nation. Higher education is thought to bring about development and to be an instrument for development. To be educated is both a right and a duty. The relationship between these aspects is seldom scrutinised. Education today is under pressure to bring about and support national development, yet the political economy of higher education is one of global competition. Issues of gender and higher education policies show both similarities and differences between the countries. Higher education is facing many difficulties today. Overcrowded universities, financial constraints and uncertain career opportunities are especially felt in Jordan and Syria. The prestige of a university education is still of importance, however, especially in the Middle East. The future is, however, very uncertain.

Tapping a Potential for the Good of All

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"

"We had the best nation on earth and our science was the mightiest, and then there passed a current over the Arab homeland which influenced our knowledge and we fell back a lot, and then we wanted to rediscover our development and win back our earlier glory and in this way our activities and our thoughts always go forward. And I am in the middle of this sea longing for progress. I dream to realise my country's progress and development and I hope to become a doctor to serve my country and its sons and daughters, rather than having to rely on foreign doctors. I want everything good for my country in the future because the progress and civilisation and greatness we used to have is a guide for how good and struggling our children are. I hope that my country develops scientifically and that knowledge spreads and that the economic situation becomes improved and that there will be more buildings and that the country will become more beautiful. In my dreams I have painted this picture and I believe in it. We are Arabs, here eternally. Like the sun setting in the east, this is our country and we dream of the day our past inheritance from our forefathers shall be returned and the country once again will stand up"

This quote is an essay written by a young Jordanian woman in her last year of secondary school. In 1988 and 1989 I did fieldwork in Jordan and Syria asking about 500 12th grade pupils to write about their future hopes and aspirations for themselves and for their country[1]. The essays depict enormous educational aspirations on the part of the pupils, as well as hopes for great national progress and development. Furthermore the pupils link their own educational success to the development of their country. By becoming a scientist, a doctor, an engineer, a pilot or a pharmacist they will help bring about development. At the same time national development will provide more opportunities in higher education for young people.

These very interesting essays reflect an almost globally accepted relationship: that between formal education and development. Formal mass education, primary, secondary and tertiary, forms a very special relationship to a discourse of national development. At the same time it is also a phenomenon which is thought both to increase globalisation and to constitute one of its characteristics. Formal mass education is first of all generally seen as a (n end) result of development. Through development more and more formal education will be spread to a population. Secondly formal education is also seen as an indicator of development. Countries are weighed and measured on a development scale by looking at the spread of formal

education on primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Mass education is hence evaluated on a global scale, and the perceived success or failure of education is used as an indicator of national ranking on a global scale. Thirdly education is also seen as an instrument to reach development. By making a population literate, by teaching certain skills, it is assumed that development will follow. The more formally educated the citizens of a nation, the more developed the nation.

Education and development constitute an enormous sub-field of scholarly (and public) interest[ii]. Modern mass education has for a long time been almost equated with development as such. Looking at the history of Europe and the USA we are told that there is a "close relationship between social progress and educational development"(Berend, 1985:31). It is generally accepted that literacy and formal education is a prerequisite for economic development. In order to "have" development, human resources have to be developed through the achievement of skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. All over the world there is a praise of education and political leaders universally extol its virtues. In fact, the perceived blessings of modern mass education are perhaps the only common denominator in world politics. Most political leaders, regardless of political or economic ideology, laud education. All over the world there is a great concern about the level of education, and about its content and form. International statistics focus on education as one indicator of development. International agencies and organisations are devoted to the spread, advancement and comparison of educational systems. Education is serious business indeed; deemed both as an almost inalienable human right and as a human obligation.

Being such an important business education- like development in general – is under constant scrutiny and evaluation in order to make "it" better, more efficient, less costly, more spread and better tuned to the demands of society. Just as formal education as such is lauded "it" is, at regular intervals considered to be in a crisis. Critical voices are just as prevalent as the generally positive view of education. Schools, it is said, do not form equally informed and knowledgeable citizens. Some critics claim that formal education is an instrument to discipline the dominated classes into submission. Others stress that there is very little relation between what pupils are taught in school and the skills they eventually develop to make careers outside school[iii]. But education, like development, has become a discourse so compelling that it is almost totally impossible to step away and question its semantic rules. Husén, a major expert on comparative education, sees the "soaring social demand for formal

education" (1985:32) in the Third World as a major global problem. He expresses it as the *revolution of rising expectations*.

EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THE NATION STATE

Historically the spread of universal formal mass education in the West is closely linked to the emergence of nation-states. This is also true of the Third World[iv]. One of the salient features of any given modern state is a national educational system and an army. Even in countries with a fair number of private educational institutions, it is commonly the state, which assumes responsibility for educational planning. The link between the state (or similar) structures and mass education is today so strong and obvious that we accept it without a thought. Gellner sees "modern education" as a mode of production (1989:29). The definition of the modern state, he argues, is that agency which has the "monopoly of legitimate education" (ibid: 34). This aspect can be added to the classical Weberian definition where the state is that agency which has a monopoly on legitimate violence. I would also argue that monopoly on legitimate development planning is an equally important aspect for, at least Third World, states. Looked at slightly different, legitimate violence, development planning and education are closely related in today's world. I argue that formal education is very important in most development plans and that education can be regarded as a symbolic and highly effective form of violence, entailing the disciplining of individuals for a higher purpose.

We can also look at education from another perspective. It is remarkable, according to some scholars, that mass education - despite the great variation of political systems– is so similar and "homogeneous in aspiration throughout the world" (Boli et al 1985:108). Mass education rests on the individual as the central unit, and its is "surprising how consistently educational systems attempt to build collective society by enhancing individual development" (ibid:109). In other words: formal schooling and mass education arose as part of whole new institutional frameworks between society and the members of society. Children were prised out of their kin-groups and families. They were put into schools to learn to become loyal individual members of (new) collectivities. Boli (1989:41) claims that modern mass education is a "ritual construction of modern citizens"[v]. Those lacking formal education are regarded as "an anomaly, a violation against the moral order" (ibid). This highly moral aspect of education is prevalent also in the Third World. A person cannot be modern- and developed – if she or he has not been to school. The school is the single most important means to become modern. Meyer (1989:xvi) argues that the salient feature of education, as we see it today, is that it

reflects a model of society in which each individual citizen has both rights and obligations. I contend that citizens, including children, are seen as a potential to be tapped for the development of the nation as well as its individual members. It rather curious that so little intellectual effort has been put into analysing the supposedly causal relationship between individual education and collective or national (and today also global) development. Adam Smith stated firmly that the individual pursuit of wealth would lead to more wealthy nations. Socialist thinkers rather claimed that the individual could not pursue happiness and fulfillment outside collectivities. Today such bland assumptions are not very fruitful. The conceptual understanding of an individual clearly depends on how an "individual" is viewed against a background of "society". The common contemporary understanding of the individual cannot be prised out of the social and collective context. In a world perceived by many as global, with shifting borders and boundaries, and with multiple and contextually anchored identities, these concepts and their mutual interdependencies begs for closer analyses.

EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN JORDAN AND SYRIA

International comparative statistics show that the Middle East/Arab World as a whole for decades lagged behind other regions in implementing universal mass education. There are, however, great variations from country to country. Some Westerners claim that "Islamic values" have blocked the expansion of secular mass education or that Islam, as a religion is not compatible with a modern school system. This argument is historically invalid and never contextually substantiated. Also in the Middle East modern mass education is linked with the emergence of the nation-state. Everywhere modern science and technology is seen to be needed and everywhere these are taught within a formal educational system.

In Syria education has expanded tremendously both in scope and in scale under Ba'th party rule. Education is free of charge and mandatory for six years, but most children finish the intermediate nine-year school. Schools are found everywhere in the country. Literacy, especially female literacy has increased dramatically. But all is not well, as witnessed by debates in Syrian newspapers in 1988 during a conference for the Teachers' Union. There were reports that dropout rates, even in primary school were alarmingly high in some regions of the country. The authorities were urged to take serious measures to amend the female dropout rate. In 1990 almost 2.5 million pupils attended primary school, an increase of a million and a half in twenty years[11]. The population increase in this period was from 6.5 million to 12 million. In the same period the number of pupils in the intermediate level

important to me because first and last it is my country. And a person is not good if he does not give to his family and his homeland and knowledge raises the level of the homeland and also the economic situation helping to serve human beings peacefully."

In this essay by a young man in a Damascus school we can see the perceived link between individual education and advancement and that of the country. A great majority of the pupils in the science branch in both Syria and Jordan express a wish, in the essays, to become medical doctors, engineers, dentists, pharmacists or scientists. A great many worry that their grades are not sufficient, or that unfair entrance practices block their entry to the desired field of study. Pupils in the literary branches also express "advanced" career aspirations. They also see their own personal educational plans in terms of giving to their country, and helping their nation to develop.

Contrary to common Western stereotypes there is no gender differences concerning stated aspirations. The Syrian and the Jordanian girls express the same wishes, as do the boys.
"In the name of God, the merciful, the Compassionate. The future...this word as I have thought about it, and I have thought much about, and we find that behind the word there are many unknown things. A human being will naturally draw up plans for the future. I, for example, am a female student in my last year and I work to get admittance to the university. How are our thoughts directed towards this? Many of us dream about university and higher studies. I want to study pharmacy at the University of Jordan and I would like to be a doctor at the Faculty of Pharmacy or Dean of this College. Sometimes you can realise your dreams but most of the time you cannot, and you will not study what you had planned, depending on many circumstances...."

A young woman in Damascus writes:
....." Since I have been a pupil I have always though about serving my Homeland and to increase its level and civilisation to the highest levels.....Since I was a child I wanted to study electronics or architecture and I have planned to really study to obtain these goals....."
Another one writes:
....."I want to become a civil engineer in the future and my road to this goal is through steady hard work. Work is what develops society....."
Another Jordanian girl writes:
....." My aspiration for the future is first and foremost to manage my studies for my exams and then attend university if I have sufficient grades. I want to study electronic engineering

doubled. The most dramatic increase, however, seems to be among secondary school students; from 80 000 to 214 000. In 1990 there were 90 000 primary teachers and more than half were women. The rate of female teachers in the intermediate and secondary schools has steadily increased and by 1991 almost half were women. But less than half of the pupils in the secondary schools were girls in 1991. From official statistics we can see a clear urban bias in female recruitment, especially in the intermediate level. Obviously girls are sorted out of the educational system quite early, but those who do continue the intermediary stage have a higher rate of continuation in secondary school compared to the average boy. Syrian statistics lend themselves very easily to a rural/urban boy/girl comparison, which is not the case of Jordanian abstracts. But on the whole there are very few urban/rural and sex differences in the Jordanian school enrollment. People I interviewed in the Syrian Ministry of Education saw areas with low enrollment and high dropout rates as "tribal" or "feudal" or simply "backward". Employees in the Jordanian ministry never expressed such views. In Syria the state should extend education to combat these perceived evils. When education gets no firm grip, the social evils can explain educational failures.

The importance of education in Jordan can be shown by the simple fact that out of around 4 million inhabitants in 1991, almost 2 million were pupils (1-12 grades)[VII]. Also in Syria "pupils" constitute the single largest "occupational category", but the ratio is not as massive as in Jordan, but rather only about one fourth of the population (the same approximate rate as in Sweden). In Jordan teachers and school administrators constitute the largest group of public employees. In Jordan the vast majority of teachers are female until the secondary school. Education in both Jordan and Syria involves an enormous amount of people. In Jordan it can be said to constitute the core activity of the state. If we add post-secondary education (about 35 000 enrolled in the early 1990s) and university education (about 25 000 students in Jordan 60 000 abroad /sic!/ in the early 1990s) and the perhaps 2 000 staff, the sheer massiveness of education is shown very starkly.

"I would like to study engineering in Syria, at Damascus University, especially architecture, because through this I can develop. I am very fond of drawing, and through this work I can raise the homeland in different ways, and in this way realise what is needed in the society I live. And concerning my country Syria, I want it to be civilised as well as in ways of building and I want to take part in these. I want my country to reach the highest levels of developed science, like electronics. And development cannot be reached without the consciousness of the individuals and their consciousness of the value of their homeland and Syria is very

and then start to work, since work is a holy message, and then I want to continue with a M. Sc. and after that I want to do a Ph. D……."

One must clearly not see these essays as simple career plans. Most pupils know that they are unable to fulfill these ambitious dreams. Neither are the stated ambitions necessarily what these young adults "really" would like to do. The essays reflect, to a certain extent, what they have been taught to see, both at home and in society at large, as desired and desirable goals, for the nation and for the individual. Furthermore these essays were written directly to me, a foreign European researcher and in that sense directed to an outside audience. Many of the pupils were probably also keen to counteract what they perceive to be a Western stereotype of Arabs as ignorant and uneducated. This perceived stereotype is at least commonly brought out in the essays. The pupils unanimously stress their duty towards the development of the nation.

EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SWEDEN

In Sweden I made a small study to complement my Jordanian and Syrian material. The essays written by the Swedish pupils were very different from the Middle Eastern. None of the pupils seemed to have any particular national aspiration. Few had any clear plan for their own educational career. On the other hand the Swedish pupils wrote much more about their personal and emotional development including marriage and children. Such issues were conspicuously absent from the Jordanian and Syrian essays[viii]. Like the Middle Eastern material there were no marked gender differences in Sweden. The Swedish essays might reflect the more unproblematic attitude pupils have towards higher education and national development. They probably feel that they have plenty of time before making educational choices, and they are perhaps also awed by the enormous variation in the supply of higher education. And probably, finally, they have little faith or hope in their own ability to contribute towards national development.

Educators, pupils, students and planners in the Arab world hence grapple with more problems than their counterparts in, for example, Sweden. But these issues aside the Middle Eastern essays do reflect the notion that individual educational advancement is a prerequisite for the development of the nation. In my Swedish essays pupils expressed singularly self-fulfillment ideas. In Sweden policy-makers, politicians and not least people in higher education constantly stress that more (higher) education is a prerequisite for the continued success of the Swedish economy, or rather today, for the exit from the economic slump of the

last decade. High unemployment rates have plagued Sweden in the last ten years, undermining faith in the welfare state, in politicians, and in traditional politics[IX]. Public spending on education, and especially higher education, continued between 1985 and 1995 when spending in the public sector was severely cut back. Education, especially adult continuous education and higher education, was uncritically perceived to be an investment for the future. The claimed shift from an industrial to an information society/economy had to be prepared by re-educating the population. In the last decade the role of higher education as part of citizens' self-fulfillment or as part of the civic "*Bildung*" tradition has not been stressed in official discourse[X]. Instead the development of science and technology is greatly stressed as the almost only road to both individual and national development. Although Swedish policymakers and educationalists have great means at their disposal in disseminating their view of the future and the role of the young generation, they also compete with many other sources of information in catching the attention of the citizens. In the Middle East policy-makers have fewer avenues to reach citizens but compete with fewer contradictory voices.

CONSTRAINTS IN EDUCATION

It is often assumed that mass education in the West spread in the period of urbanisation and industrialisation. But this is not, in general, true. In Europe, Japan and North America mass education and practically universal literacy preceded industrialisation and urbanisation (Boli et al 1985:113). Husén claims that one cannot compare the spread of mass education in the West with the spread in the Third World of the last decades. He is critical of the way education has been "sold to the Third World as an instrument to bring about development and economic take-off (Husén 1985:32) and points to a number of important issues. In the West costs for education are sometimes criticised. But we should remember that in any given Third world country the educational costs proportionally swallow much more of the public budget. In most Third World countries education even up to the tertiary level is often free of charge. According to Husén "meritocratic ideas have become very important for Third world careers" (ibid). This feeds into the revolution of rising expectations, as more and more young people spend more and more time in schools and in institutions of higher learning. A dramatically increasing number of young people become highly educated but have fewer opportunities to get the kinds of jobs they expect, they want and feel they deserve.

This revolution of rising expectations is typical of countries like Jordan and Syria. My essays show that not only do pupils have great educational ambitions, they are also educationally

geared towards specific paths into higher education. Both Syria and Jordan have, since the end of the 1980's tried to steer secondary school pupils from the science and literary branches into industrial and commerce branches as well as vocational schools. Educational planners realise those not only medical doctors but nurses and medical technicians are needed. But authorities have not been so successful in this endeavor despite the increasing difficulties, both in Jordan and in Syria, in gaining access to the prestigious colleges of medicine, pharmacy and engineering. Despite the commonly recognised difficulties in entry, the difficulties of completion and the increasing difficulties in finding jobs even for doctors and engineers, students still flock at the gates of these prestigious colleges. In Jordan more and more private colleges are opening to cater to national and regional students. In Jordan education has become perhaps the most important economic sector of the country. Yet employment seldom matches the formal education of the young generation.

In Syria, where I recently completed a year long fieldwork in Aleppo, educational and employment policies have drastically changed in the last decade. Before all university graduates were guaranteed – and were obliged for certain professions – public employment. This is no longer the case. The state can no longer possibly absorb into employment all university graduates. Now there is a semi-official debate about the unemployment of doctors and engineers and the dismal future of more and more young people with high education. Despite these difficulties many young people still want to become doctors and engineers. The social prestige of such an education, and such a title is still high in the Middle East, combined with a deep-rooted longing to "better one's country". There is also a muted debate about the dismal level of higher education in Syria. Such a debate is carried on worldwide among students and professors. Also in Sweden there are loud complains about the difficulties in higher education when demands in secondary school are lowered and when universities and colleges are forced to accept more and more students with poor educational foundation[xi]. Today higher education worldwide is mass education and clearly faces enormous difficulties. In countries with an extremely young population, like Jordan and Syria, these problems are compounded. The educational institutions whether primary, secondary or tertiary cannot keep pace with the enormous, and still increasing, cohorts of every single school year. Yet putting the young into schools and keeping them there for as long as possible is the goal of policy-makers in the Jordan and Syria. Youngsters can be socially and politically controlled. They stay out of trouble and can be nationally molded.

GENDER AND EDUCATION

Today gender is a much-debated aspect of education in general and higher education in particular. We saw above that in both Syria and especially Jordan female education has made great strides. In Syria there is still an urban bias to female education. Women are often singled out in development rhetoric and said to be in special need of development and education. The fertility rates and health status of a given population is typically said to depend on the educational level of the female population[xii]. For many states the increased participation of women in education and in the official workforce is used symbolically to stress commitment to progress and development. Women, more than men can be seen as a potential to be tapped. But women are also often the symbol of cultural authenticity (Rabo 1996, Chatty & Rabo 1997) and hence the means and goals for female education continue to be contested.

The Middle Eastern region varies greatly in accessibility and recruitment of women in higher education. In Jordan and Syria school administrators I interviewed claimed that girls had higher grades in secondary school than boys. In Jordan almost as many women as men enter higher education while in Yemen women constitute only 14% of the university students (Mazawi 1999). In the Arab Peninsula women are significantly more than men in institutions of higher learning, mainly because men study abroad (ibid). Women in higher education in the Middle East typically enter "traditional" female concerns like teaching and administrative work seen as a "natural extension of their roles as wives and mothers" (Hijab 1988:68). But more and more enter colleges of science, technology and medicine. The Middle East as a whole, however, still has a fairly low participation of its educated women in the workforce.

Also in Sweden we can discern ambiguities in female education. Universal literacy and universal formal education long history in Sweden. Women have slowly climbed higher and higher on the educational ladder. By 1875 women were allowed to enter all university faculties, but few women actually did go to university (Rabo 1997: 117). In the 1930s around one fourth of the university students were women but by the end of the 1990s a majority (56 %) of the students were women. "Only among the engineering students are men still the majority" (ibid). More and more women continue to graduate school, more and more women teach at our universities, but men still heavily dominate as the prestigious holders of chairs. The Swedish government and the parliament are committed to a policy of gender equality, including education. Women's talents are thought to be "wasted" in higher education. An official report recently stated that "*Sweden needs to pledge its best resources of talent to*

develop the welfare of the country and create new knowledge. It is a misuse of resources not to utilise fully the potential and reserve of talent that women constitute" (SOU/Official Inquiry of the State/ 1996.29:279, quoted in Rabo 1997:118). The tone of the report feels very familiar. Human potential must be utilised for the good of the nation and for the good of the individual (i.e. women). But Swedish women are, according to the educational authorities, too traditional. They continue to choose the "wrong" and obsolete branches of higher education. Sweden needs to develop science and technology and here funding is much higher than in the humanities, the social sciences and even in medicine. Yet women, much more than men, do not choose these fields for the future. From the point of view of planners in Sweden, women are more of a potential than men, yet their choices are more "wrong". Sweden has a good world reputation as a country of gender equality. Yet gender equality is only partial. A few months ago we had a media uproar when it was discovered that girls, compared to boys, have for the last decade done significantly better in all secondary schools. Now educationalists and policy-makers are worried that the educational system disadvantages boys. The main problem was said to be the lack of male teachers!

GROWING GAPS

Reformers of educational systems may, like Husén, point out the weaknesses of theses systems, but it seems almost impossible to arrive at a solution. How can the problems of "meritocracy " be avoided in the Middle East? After all, the mechanisms behind "over-education" stem from an honest wish on the part of policy-makers and on the part of citizens at large to enhance and develop the nation and its individuals. Globally we all seem to be caught in an educational race where some are bound to be winners and some to be losers, and yet the losers cannot, and are not allowed to give up. The gap among nations of the world between educational "excellence" and "mediocrity" seems to be ever widening. Yet another problem is that science is talked about as universal and having global repercussions while educational systems are nationally bounded and framed within a discourse of national development. The political economy of science and education is certainly not an economy of even distribution (cf. Alvarez 1992). My essays from Jordan and Syria mirror these ambiguities. Some pupils write that they wish to do graduate work outside the Middle East, preferably in the USA or in West Europe. One girl in Amman writes: " *I see that many boys study abroad and I was against this, but now I have understood that it is important that we learn also from others and that the wishes of the individual are realised* ". On the other hand the pupils keenly feel that they are considered as "educationally inferior" in the West and

struggle to counteract this image. "*Arabs are the origin of civilisation and knowledge and science, and we will return to this situation*".

Young students in Sweden are not faced with that particular contradiction. They are told that a study period abroad is important to expand their educational horizons and to enhance the "internationalisation" of Sweden. There is financial support to expand student exchange. It is a stated goal today that at least one third of the students should spend a t least one semester abroad. Most Swedish University students prefer to study in an English-speaking country but a fair number study in non-English speaking countries. Most students prefer to study in the West but there is a trickle also to other countries. Student exchange is hence by Swedish authorities felt to prepare the young generation for a more global future, but the "globe" clearly excludes large part of the world.

On the other hand there are, even in Sweden, many tensions between national development and the "global demands" on higher education. Higher education is almost exclusively publicly financed and deemed to be of vital national importance. The Swedish economy relies very heavily on exports and the development of the natural sciences and technology is seen as a prerequisite for national economic success. Yet the nature of the global economy today is predatory and pays no attention to national economic interests, especially those of smaller countries. It is quite possible that investment in specific fields of research and education will not pay off "nationally". Furthermore Swedish researchers (and industrial interests) in key fields of medicine and electronics can pressure politicians to get more funds. The problem of a "brain-drain" is not acute in Sweden compared to most developing countries, lacking research facilities or paying lower salaries. But the threat is used as a lever in the politics of higher education in Sweden.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

There are many common denominators between perceptions of the educational policymakers in Jordan and Syria on the one hand and Sweden on the other. There are also commonalties between pupils and students in the three countries. The educational policymakers have to try and make a multitude of demands which fit the economic means. They have to make educational plans for a future, which is increasingly difficult to foresee. Pupils and students are faced with every increasing demand to become competent and useful. Also they have to make educational plans for an unforeseeable future. For all involved education will never be perfect and never fulfill its promises. But the issues and constraints facing policy-makers and

students in the Middle East differ in significant ways from the Swedish counterparts. Sweden has an aging population and young educated citizens will probably be much in demand. The young do feel insecure and worried about global threats to the environment and to peace and security. But they have a basic confidence that "things will work out" for themselves as adult individuals. They are also confident that Sweden will continue to belong to that club of rich nations which can afford to spend heavily on higher education. Young Swedish students are also much less concerned with the over-arching educational goals of the policy-makers. They are obviously influenced by policies, by entrance requirements and career opportunities. But formal education for most seems to be just a small part of a larger "life-project". In the Middle East the situation is different. Vast numbers of young people are heavily influenced by hopes created through mass education. For the Syrian and the Jordanian students we should not totally dismiss the idea of the revolution of raising expectations. Many young people in these countries feel cheated of their future. They express that they are unable to get jobs suited to their educational level. Many pupils, especially in my Jordanian material, also harbor deep grievances against the West which, in their eyes, block the successful development of their nation, homeland or region. To always compare oneself and one's country in a global hierarchy of development, and to always have others – outsiders – ranking you as lacking something, is an integral part of these young people's lives. To be seen as an untapped potential, and to see themselves as misused is also part of their lives. How to change this, is, however, another story.

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[i] This fieldwork was sponsored by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It was a comparative study of how ideas about development are produced and transmitted in Jordan and Syria. The essays were written anonymously by pupils in classrooms I visited and observed. I asked the pupils to write about their hopes for their own future and that of their country. For more details on the essays see **Rabo** 1992 a and **Rabo** 1992 b.

[ii] For useful overview of this field see **Fägerlind** and **Saha** 1983.

[iii] For critical views on education see for example **Althusser** (education as part of the ideological state apparatus), **Bernstein** (the new class society as reflected in the educational system), **Bourdieu** (on symbolic capital and educational credentials), **Collins** (on the lack of fit between educational merits and societal needs), **Durkheim** (on the function of education in modern societies), and **Freire** (on the educational system as oppressive).

[iv] *Third World* is rightly a highly contested concept today. It is still useful I think to underline the vast gaps in control and use of resources. See **Escobar** 1995 for an analysis of the discursive interconnection between development and underdevelopment, and the link between this discourse and social phenomena.

[v] For a highly original and thought-provoking cultural analysis of modern education see **McLaren** 1986 (3rd revised edition 1999) Schooling as Ritual Performance.

[vi] All Syrian figures are from Statistical Abstracts, Syrian Arab Republic, 1991.

[vii] The Jordanian figures are from Jordan's Five-year plan 1986-1990.

[viii] I find it highly interesting that the students in their essays did not follow common cultural stereotyping; i.e. that Arabs are family-centred and that Swedes lack a family feeling. These essays cannot be used to claim the opposite, but only indicate the interests expressed among these young adults.

[ix] In the middle of the 1990s open unemployment rates reached 10% in Sweden. A further 6% of the workforce was engaged in continuing education of some kind. High unemployment has been the most severe test to the endurance of the classical Swedish welfare model which emerged especially after WW II.

[x] The Bildung (Sw. *bildning*) tradition has been very strong in Sweden (and Scandinavia) both among liberal and socialist thinkers and policy-makers in the last hundred years. Education was seen as both a civic right and duty to "enlarge" the potential for democratic interaction.

[xi] There are no objective criteria with which to test today's students against former generations. Yet everywhere teachers and professors complain that the standard and level is lower "today". This is not a new phenomenon, and can be seen as an indicator of the gap between ambitions and educational resources. Hence the complaint can be seen as healthy criticism. On the other hand it is also demoralising for students to hear that they do not measure up to the expected level.

[xii] Demographers find a statistically significant relationship between female education, lower fertility rates and lowered infant death. Clearly such a related cluster exists. These models are presented as causal but are not, in fact and can furthermore not be used to predict the effects on fertility and infant mortality correlated to educational levels among women. For conventional example of a demographic development model see **Winckler** 1999. For interesting and complex comparison between Morocco and Egypt in terms of fertility and female education see **Courbage** 1994.